

AG/PLANNING/TOURISM/COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
MARCH 23, 2015

AG/PLANNING COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: Idleman, Brown, Haff, Dumas, Armstrong, Fedler, Shaw

AG/PLANNING/TOURISM/COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT: None.

SUPERVISORS: Henke, Hicks, O'Brien, Lindsay, LaPointe, Gang, Campbell

Sandy Huffer, Deputy Clerk

Roger Wickes, County Attorney

Laura Oswald, Dir. Economic Dev.

Kevin Hayes, County Administrator

Public

AGENDA AS PRESENTED IN COMMITTEE NOTICE:

- 1) Call to Order
- 2) Accept Minutes – February 23, 2015
- 3) Impact of Cycling and Snowmobiling on Economic Development – Dieter Drake & Dave Perkins
- 4) Agriculture ASA
 - A. Purchase of Development Rights Program
 - B. Consider Resolution Urging the NYS Legislature to Amend Eligibility Requirements for Farmland Protection Implementation Projects
- 5) Economic Development – Laura Oswald Presentation – Community Development Funding
- 6) Planning – Chris DeBolt
- 7) Tourism – Christine Hoffer
- 8) Other Business
- 9) Adjournment

Chair Idleman called the meeting to order at 1:00 P.M.

A motion to accept the minutes of the February 23, 2015 meeting, was moved by Mr. Brown, seconded by Mr. Haff and adopted.

TOURISM – Christine Hoffer distributed the March Report:

- Received I Love NY funding from the state \$52,303.
- Craft Beverage Initiative – Adirondack Regional Chamber of Commerce applied and received \$177,000 to promote the Adirondack Craft Beverage trail. This will benefit Washington County because all of our craft beverage producers are on that trail.
- She attended the Adirondack Sports and Fitness Show to promote the spring events and happenings in Washington County.
- Participated in the Tourism Action Day at the Capital.
- Upcoming Events – March 24 familiarization trip with ACC and a group of exchange students focusing on ag. Will visit Rathbuns, Slate Valley Museum, Battenkill Valley Creamery, and will take them across the Rexleigh Covered bridge. March 26 – 29 a Watchable Wildlife event in which ten journalists from the UK are coming to Washington and Saratoga counties. Cycling familiarization event with tour operators from UK in May, exact date to be determined. Escape maker food and agri-tourism show in Brooklyn May 2 and will be able to have a farmer's market set up at the entrance where they can sell products. The Greenwich gauntlet is May 9. The Survive the Farm event is May 30.
- She was asked to join a delegation from the capital region to Washington DC to participate in Destination Capitol Hill. It is similar to Tourism Action Day in NYS. Mr. Haff asked about a bill congress is entertaining for bicycles on Amtrak trains. She stated it is on the agenda for the Destination Capitol Hill event.
- Raptor Fest is next weekend.

AGRICULTURE – Renee Bouplon of ASA addressed the following will the committee

- Distributed Overview of Purchase of Development Rights Program and Partnership between Washington County and ASA (attached). Last year, after a six year hiatus, the state issued requests for proposals. They also made changes to the PDR program eligibility. Land trusts can now apply directly. All entities are limited to four applications and the grant applicant must now hold the easement. Farmers have expressed concern about counties and towns holding easements. The estimated cost to steward an easement which goes on in perpetuity is \$15,000 per property. Possibly the county could contract out the stewardship of the easement. ASA is now accepting pre-applications which are due to them April 10. \$14 million proposed in the 2015-2016 state budget for farmland protection. There is an additional \$20 million (one time deal) proposed for Hudson Valley farmland protection, which Washington County is considered a part of.
- Resolution Urging the NYS Legislature to Amend Eligibility Requirements for Farmland Protection Implementation Projects – By limiting the applicant eligibility to those entities willing to hold easements and limiting the number of applications submitted by those entities, farmers residing in counties or municipalities that do not have the capacity to hold easements will be at a disadvantage when applying for program funds. ASA would like the eligibility requirements to return to what they were before; eligible towns and counties can apply for funding and partner with a land trust to hold the easement. A motion to present a resolution urging the New York State legislature to amend eligibility requirements for farmland protection implementation projects, was moved by Mr. Shaw, seconded by Mr. Brown and adopted. Mr. Brown was concerned that by the time the Board considered this resolution in April, it would be too late to have an impact and suggested it be sent on behalf of the committee. A motion to send out this resolution on behalf of this committee, was moved by Mr. Brown, seconded by Mr. Shaw and adopted.

IMPACT OF CYCLING AND SNOWMOBILING ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – David Perkins, Trails Funds Coordinator for the Washington County Association of Snowmobile Clubs distributed maps of snowmobile trails in Washington County. Regarding impact on economic development, Dave stated that in the absence of hard numbers, it is directly proportional to the availability and quality of snowmobile trails. This year was exemplary. Throughout the county, clubs really stepped up their grooming and maintenance this year. With the Dix Bridge opening up, the impacts in Washington County were quick to be seen. Several businesses in Washington County reported very good business this year from snowmobile sales to apparel sales. He complimented the view shed in Washington County. Would like a greater presence on the Tourism website. He encountered people on the trail who had never rode in Washington County and he heard comments regarding Washington County snowmobiling such as "Best kept secret in New York State". Wants to work on making connections between places offering lodging and existing trails to attract more people from out of the county, making destination riding. The clubs are grateful for the County's support.

Chair Idleman invited all Supervisors to ask people from their towns who have a business or are contributing to economic development in the County to come to a committee meeting. She would like to highlight one each month. Mr. Brown suggested inviting Jay Skellie, President of Washington County Farm Bureau.

PLANNING – Chris DeBolt, Planner addressed the following items with the committee:

- County Planning Board March meeting. Four projects, three a matter of local concern. One project approved is a business adding a 1,500 sq. ft. cold storage facility. It's a good sign

they are doing well.

- Washington County Ag & Farmland Protection Plan Grant – We received the contractor information checklist and have completed and returned it. Ag & Markets now has the information they need to develop the contract. The State is way behind getting contracts out and getting approval through the Comptroller's office. The grant is good from the date of the award letter which was back in February. We are proceeding with the planning process and tracking hours that will count toward the local match but not spending any cash until we have a contract. Chris was contacted by Peter Manning who owns a planning and consulting firm. The firm contracted with Glens Falls Hospital through their Creating Healthy Places to Live Work and Play initiative to undertake a Smart Growth Assessment of Land Use Regulations for the towns of Lake George and Fort Edward. He contacted Chris saying he has \$3,000 left over for Smart Growth work specifically in Washington County. Chris and Laura discussed this and feel it should be tied to agriculture. This can count towards our local match. The contract is between Glens Falls Hospital and Mr. Manning. All we have to do is provide him direction. As long as the committee is comfortable with it, he will work with Mr. Manning to come up a plan of work that will work with our Farmland Protection Plan. Chris is thinking of having him look at land use regulations in the bigger municipalities that have the most development pressure and what their land use regulations are in terms of smart growth and have him provide a list of recommendations of how we can implement more farmer friendly smart growth. A motion to support Chris moving forward with this concept, was moved by Mr. Armstrong, seconded by Mrs. Dumas and adopted.
- Internship Request – They were contacted by a Washington County graduate student who is interested in an unpaid internship with the department. The intern is enrolled in the Master of Science degree program in Resilient and Sustainable Communities at Green Mountain College. He has compiled a list of expected duties and feels it will be helpful in the department. A motion to approve an unpaid internship request in the Planning department, was moved by Mr. Brown, seconded by Mr. Armstrong and adopted. Mr. Haff opposed.
- Legislative Gazette Special Edition – We have the opportunity to have a special insert published for Washington County by the Legislative Gazette. We would have to develop all of the content for the special edition. We will be provided 4,000 copies of the special edition that we can distribute however we want. There is no cost to the county. We would need to get the copy to them by May. Chris will work with Christine, Laura and Deanna to come up with the content and move forward as soon as possible. A motion to authorize Chris moving forward to develop content for a special insert in the Legislative Gazette, was moved by Mr. Armstrong, seconded by Mrs. Dumas and adopted. Chris will bring the copy back to committee for approval before submission.
- DOS LGE Grant – This is a grant for the Sheriff and Public Safety. Chris is making some minor adjustments to the proposed work plan. Initial feedback from DOS is positive regarding the changes as they were all justifiable.
- Website Use Policy – A final version was submitted to the Government Operations Committee and was referred to the full Board for approval.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – Laura Oswald, Director of Economic Development gave a PowerPoint Presentation on 2015 Funding Opportunities - Community Development, Environmental, Infrastructure, Sense of Place and Wellness.

BROADBAND - Laura is still in the process of collecting information about broadband and how as a county we participate at the regional level to potentially access funding that is out there and how we go about getting a better understanding of what our existing broadband needs are.

OTHER BUSINESS – Mr. Haff distributed USDA Rural Development information, Community-Oriented Connectivity Broadband Grant Program, Rural Broadband Loan Program, Distance Learning and Telemedicine Program and Telecommunications Loan Program and pages from an FCC document on broadband (on file). He stated that February 27th, the FCC ruled that internet is no longer an information service, it's now telecommunications. Now that the internet is considered telecommunications, they are considered common carriers, subject to the Telecommunications Act of 1996.

Mr. Haff displayed a topographic map of the Town of Hartford created in Real Property that shows all parcels, owners, roads and hilltops. He took information he has of Time Warner routes and overlaid who has Time Warner cable in the Town. There is a proposal from Verizon to bring in a cell tower in Hartford and they provided him their anticipated propagation map. He is going to overlay this information. He encouraged each Town Supervisor to gather this information for their towns and not wait for the County to do it for them. The County could string these maps together, the goal being getting a better understanding of our broadband needs.

Meeting adjourned at 3:40 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

*Sandy Huffer, Deputy Clerk
Washington County Board of Supervisors*

**Overview of Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program and
Partnership between Washington County and ASA**
March 23, 2015

Timeline

1984 – The Agricultural Opportunities Committee (AG OPP) was formed to promote Washington County as good place to farm and to create strategies to keep agriculture economically viable. A Farm Match program was created by AG OPP in 1985 to provide farm sellers with direct access to farm buyers wishing to relocate to Washington County, but the difference in agricultural value vs. speculation value was an obstacle. The idea of establishing a land trust to address this issue grew out of the AG OPP program.

1990 – Agricultural Stewardship Association, a nonprofit land trust, was organized to create an appropriate vehicle to hold and enforce agricultural conservation easements. In 1995, ASA initiated the framework for a Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program at the request of farmers, and began raising money to seed the program.

1996 – County adopts Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan. A recommendation in the Plan is to utilize PDR, which is an incentive-based, voluntary land protection technique.

1996 – NYS creates state farmland protection program and offers grants for PDR. There have been 13 rounds of grants since its inception.

1997 - The county (including the Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board) and ASA partner and apply for state funding. The county enters into an agreement with ASA to administer the projects with technical support provided by staff members of various county agencies. Many successful PDR proposals have been awarded over the years as a result of this partnership. Until the 2014 funding round, only municipalities (county and *eligible* towns) could apply for the grants (not land trusts).

2006 – County and ASA revise agreement. ASA acts as the general program administrator for the PDR program and keeps the Agriculture, Planning, Tourism and Community Development Committee informed of its activities and its applications to the State. A selection committee, comprised of members of the county Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board and ASA staff/board, reviews proposals and ranks them according to state criteria. ASA writes the grants (at no charge) and, if awarded, administers the grant, negotiates the conservation easement, and monitors, defends and enforces the easement terms in perpetuity. The county is the municipal sponsor of the grant and receives the funds from the state.

2014 – State issues request for proposals after a 6 year hiatus (last request was in 2008). State makes changes to the PDR program eligibility. Now land trusts can apply directly. Grant applicant must now be easement holder. Entities limited to four applications. ASA submits 4 applications for its service area (Washington and Rensselaer counties) and receives 3 awards, one of which is in Washington County.

PDR Program Statistics

11 NYS grants with Washington County as awardee (one in process)

- 3,202 acres; \$4.18M in state funding, \$600K in federal funding, \$658K in local match

1 NYS grant with Easton as awardee

- 234 acres; \$258K in state funding, \$50K in local match

1 NYS grant with Kingsbury as awardee (in process)

- 340 acres; \$470K in state funding, \$156K in federal match

1 NYS grant with ASA as awardee (in process)

- 611 acres; \$904K in state funding, \$129K in local match

Totals for state PDR grants in Washington County

- 14 grants on 4,387 acres; \$7.45M in funding

PDR process

Outreach to farmers about the program (mailings, emails, press releases, workshops, meetings)

Farmer completes pre-applications

Selection Committee ranks pre-applications

ASA writes grants for chosen projects (needs letter of support from town and letter of endorsement from county Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board)

ASA administers awarded grants

ASA has long term responsibility to hold, monitor, enforce and defend conservation easements

Proposed FY2015-2016 State Budget

\$14 million proposed for state farmland protection funding in Environmental Protection Fund (EPF)

\$20 million proposed for Hudson Valley farmland protection (one time deal)

Current challenge

ASA has the capacity to write up to 8 PDR grants per funding round (four per county). However, we are currently limited to a total of four based on changes to the state program. This puts area farmers at a disadvantage because their project may score high enough to meet the state threshold and therefore could be fundable, but ASA has only four slots. If the state would reverse last year's change to the program and allow municipalities to apply with land trusts holding the easements, then more applications could be submitted.

The Washington County Agricultural and Farmland Protection Board, Washington County Farm Bureau, Rensselaer County Legislature and Rensselaer County Farm Bureau have all passed resolutions that support allowing eligible municipalities to apply for state Farmland Protection Implementation Projects grant funding without requiring them to be the easement holders of awarded projects. Furthermore, they supported municipalities partnering with land trusts to implement and be the easement holder of such grants.